

The Mondo Film & Video Guide Interview with Henry Jaglom

Conducted By: Mondo Justin

Mondo Film And Video Guide Editor

<p style="text-align: justify;">I first became aware of the films of Henry Jaglom in the summer of 1995. It was a difficult period of my life. I was forced to leave college because of my parents approaching divorce. I was in a confusion of utter despair, depression and falling quickly into shambles. I couldn't understand how two people, after being married for 30 years could just pack it up and leave each other. They loved each other, but yet the marriage was over? I felt as though it was the end of my own existence somehow.

It's a scary thought. It makes any ideal of a future with love and romance for oneself, dark and lacking hope. Then I discovered the Jaglom's films, ALWAYS(1985) and SOMEONE TO LOVE(1987). I had never seen anything like these two films before or since in my short life.

ALWAYS(1985) details the disintegration of a marriage in its final moments. Jaglom shot the film, starring with his soon to be ex-wife. She agreed to the project, while they were officially separated. They filmed ALWAYS in Jaglom's home, which they [at the time] shared in real life. Jaglom made the film in an attempt to reconcile the relationship. What the audience see's in ALWAYS is an examination of modern marriage. It was the most painful experience of Jaglom's life, and it's captured on celluloid.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Jaglom's films for me were like cinematic hugs. Finally I had found someone that really understood what I was feeling. A good friend, that had experienced the same as I. Henry Jaglom is a man searching for the truth, in life, love, romance and lust, and somehow, he captures it with his camera.

These aren't just movies. They're truthful, albeit epic and profound tales of the human condition. Jaglom's films are true stories of someone searching for the answer to life's questions.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Feeling empathic, inspired and cured by Jaglom's work, I wrote him a simple fan letter in Winter of '97 to tell him just how much his films meant to me. How they'd helped me and inspired me in a major and difficult time. He wrote me back two weeks later.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Jaglom is the quintessential actor's director. He's the ultimate independent American film auteur. Extracting truths from his actors instead of imposing. His work has been compared to that of filmmaker John Cassavetes, Andy Warhol, and of the early French new wave. But Jaglom's work is much more significant. Cassavetes, Warhol and Godard never came close to achieving what Jaglom has done. He's created work that should be in the Smithsonian.</p>

In the past, Jaglom's been accused of being a perfectionist by some. Jaglom is a self admitted egomaniac. Regardless, one thing is for certain regarding Jaglom. Henry Jaglom is one of the warmest and nicest guy's you'll ever encounter in your life.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">[On conclusion of this interview, I informed Jaglom that I only own his films on VHS, three days later, Jaglom has gifted me his entire filmography on DVD via mail]

Jaglom came to Hollywood from New York as a playwright and actor. He became involved in Lee Strasberg's Actor's Studio alongside, Jack Nicholson, Bruce Dern, Diane Ladd, and Peter Fonda. As an actor, Jaglom was contracted at Columbia Studios, and landed acting roles on television shows like, THE FLYING NUN and GIDGET. As the 70's approached, Jaglom worked on several projects in front and behind the camera, including working as an editor on Dennis Hopper's seminal culture blast, EASY RIDER(1969), and acting in such films as Hopper's, THE LAST MOVIE, and the Roger Corman produced, PSYCH-OUT. In 1971, Jaglom made his first film, A SAFE PLACE, with Orson Welles as actor. They maintained a legendary friendship until Welles death in 1985.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Jaglom has made eighteen films to date. His film work has been critically lambasted as well as hailed as influentially classic. He's informed me that he's aiming to complete at least 26 films.

I've interviewed over 40 filmmakers, actors, and comedians over the last year. I've never felt any type of stress, anxiety or intimidation in preparation. But when it came time to interview Henry Jaglom, I was a little apprehensive. I wasn't sure if I was smart enough to exist in Jaglom's universe. I'd soon find out. While discovering Jaglom, I invite you to take your time, and experience the various audio, video and images I've incorporated into this effort. It's important to show people who aren't familiar with Jaglom's work, exactly why I consider him to be one of the greatest filmmaker of our time.</p>

You were born in London, England?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I was born in London. But I don't remember being there. It was by chance that I was born there. My dad at the time was working in London, and this was during World War II. So my dad decided to bring us to America, I was 1 year old at the time. So, we crossed on the Empresses Of Britain. It's my understanding that while we were crossing, German U-boats were torpedoing several boats crossing the Atlantic. And this included our sister ship, which the German's did destroy, sinking it, and everyone aboard was lost. So my first crossing was somewhat lucky and dramatic. It hasn't been as dramatic since.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">You came to New York City from London, right?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Yeah, I was brought up in New York City. Even though I've lived the second half of my life in Los Angeles, I still feel very much a New Yorker at heart.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Do you remember you're first movie experience?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I remember the first play I saw. It featured a actress by the name of Bea Lillie. It was called, INSIDE USA. My mother took me to the play. Every time an actor or actress would go off stage, I would begin trying to figure out what was going on backstage. So that was my very first hint, that I'd be taking an interest in what was going on behind the scenes. I became really obsessed with this, and I was only around five years old. I guess I really wanted to figure out all the mechanics of the back-stage.

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Then I started seeing a series of great Broadway musicals. I saw productions of THE KING & I and GUYS AND DOLLS. You know all the great musicals of that period, and I fell in love with show business. I became fascinated with show business. Meanwhile, at night, my parents were not allowing me to watch television, cause they considered it uncultured. So I was always listening to the radio. And to this day, I'm still mad with them, cause I really missed out on the golden age of comedy on television.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">So I had the radio, and by this time I had also discovered comic books. And I think those two outlets, really influenced and educated me in what I do today. I loved the stories of the superhero's and of the Archie and Veronica books. With the radio, I started to create visually in my head what I was being

deprived of while listening, images of emotion. It was a movie in my head, that was always running. There was a program called THE LUX RADIO THEATER ON THE AIR and one night, they presented a play called, LUX PRESENTS HOLLYWOOD. So listening, laying on my bed, I decided that I was gonna go to the movies. There was something magical about what I was hearing on the radio, and it was putting images of the stories in my head. I started telling my mother that I was gonna go out to Hollywood and make movies. I was telling her this when I was around 7 or 8 years old. My mom, would look at me and say, "What are you talking about, eat your soup."</p>

As a seven or eight year old kid, what type of films were you watching?

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<p style="text-align: justify;">I was obsessed with Bob Hope and Bing Cosby movies, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin movies. My goal was to go to Paramount, cause that's where Bob Hope and Bing Crosby made their movies, and I decided that I'd smoke Chesterfield cigarettes cause that's the brand that they advertised. I had it all worked out.

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So what did you do when you finally got to Hollywood?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I did end up going to college first. I went for four years to the University of Pennsylvania. There was no film department there. I was bidding my time there, I went cause my dad wanted me to have a back up. However, the whole time I was there, I did nothing but write, direct and act in plays, just waiting for my time that I could leave for Hollywood. When I finished school I went back to New York for a short time and got involved in the Actor's Studio, and it wasn't too long after that, I left for Hollywood.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">When I got there with the background and experience I had earned as an actor/writer/director by then, I was put under contract at Columbia Pictures, and starting doing stuff like GIDGET and THE FLYING NUN, which wasn't really what I had in mind, career wise.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">How did you get cast in Roger Corman's L.S.D morality tale, Psych Out?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Jack

Nicholson got me that part. I met Jack at the Actor's Studio. I was glad I got that part, cause I was the guy who PSYCH-OUT. I was the moral of the film, which was if you take bad L.S.D, you get your hand cut off...laughing...</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I love that scene. It's great, cause the special effects are so bad. It always looked to me, that you had an chicken leg taped to your hand upside down. Were the side burn's real? </p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">laughing... It was really the worst make up job in the history of movies. No the burns were not real. They were awful. During shooting, Jack Nicholson was calling me Scrooge McDuck. And to this day, 30 plus years down the road, Nicholson, every time I see him, asks me, "Where are your Scrooge McDucks?" It was fun doing the movie though, I had a good time.</p>

You and Nicholson did a few other things together early on, didn't you?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Yep, I acted in a film he directed called, DRIVE, HE SAID. We made a deal prior, that we'd act in each others first movies. So by the time I got the opportunity to direct my first movie, A SAFE PLACE, Jack was the biggest star in the country. He was getting a million dollars a movie by this time. So I couldn't afford him, but we had a deal. So he did my first movie, for a color television that he really liked.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Didn't you do something similar with Dennis Hopper?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Yes. Dennis and I had the same kind of deal. I acted in his film, THE LAST MOVIE. I got sick during the filming though. I couldn't take Peru, and couldn't take the altitude. Dennis of course, did my film, TRACKS. Which I still think is one of his greatest performances, it shows, the real trauma of being Dennis Hopper. It's also the first movie to examine the after-effects of Vietnam.

Isn't your first film, A SAFE PLACE getting a Criterion DVD release soon?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Yeah, and it's very rewarding to me. To see A SAFE PLACE getting this DVD release proves all the critic's wrong that trashed it when it first came out. I mean it got attacked. I can remember the New York Times or Time Magazine said the film looked like it had been tossed in the air and landed in a mix master. They said it made no sense. When really, I had a very clear and precise vision for that film. I was trying to play

with conventional film structure. I was playing with daydream and fact, illusion and reality, and the emotions of past, present, and future. I didn't wanna give it any type of conventional line, meaning why follow the tradition of where something begins and ends. The film was a failure, and people stayed away from it. It did get a great notice from Anais Nin however.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Jack Nicholson told me, that A SAFE PLACE would be a failure in America. He said, that I should dub everyone in French, and change my name from Henry Jaglom to Henri Jaglum and release it. He said the film would be lauded as the greatest film since the work of Godard and Fellini. He was joking of course, but here, forty years later, with this Criterion release, the irony is very present, however belated, and it feels great.</p>

>What do you think of the 1997 documentary, WHO IS HENRY JAGLOM (1997)?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Well, I understood the filmmakers. It was made by a couple young guys, that were hungry filmmakers. They were looking for something shocking and controversial about me. And there just isn't anything about my life in that vein. The only person I trust in that movie is Candice Bergen. I thought the film was gonna be more about my work, and not about personality or a exaggerated character. However, I do find it somewhat charming, and I do send it to people.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Look at my brother in the movie, Michael. He's screaming on the subway. I saw that, and I said to him "Michael, what are you doing? People are gonna think you hate me." He said to me, " Henry, the only way people are gonna pay intention is if you give them what they want. What am I gonna tell them? That's really not much to tell them."

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<p style="text-align: justify;">It's not a bad documentary. I think it's kind of funny. Especially that lady standing at the top of the stadium during the football game shouting "Henry Jaglom hates women."

How did your film ALWAYS(1985) come about?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Cause she was gonna leave me, I loved her, and I didn't wanna let her go. She was a few years younger, she had came to me from her parent's house. She thought there

was more out in the world for her. I told her there was nothing out there, and it would take her a few years to realize it. She didn't have enough life experience, and I didn't want her to break my heart. So I thought that by making the film, it would make her realize how wonderful we had been together. I thought we'd get back together, but it just didn't work out that way.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">It was like a sad party. Our house was filled with people, there was food there. We're shooting this movie together, doing all this romantic stuff together for the camera, and at the end of the day, when everyone leaves, I'd ask her if she'd stay over with me, and she always said "No I think I'd better go home."

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<p style="text-align: justify;">It was a incredibly painful process for me. But I tried to get the truth out on the film. The truth about two people that love each other. This whole concept is a terrible dilemma of my generation. Before, people had left each other cause they didn't like each other. But that's changed, and this type of situation was more complicated. This was a story that had not been told before on film.</p>

How much of something like Always (1985) was scripted?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Well, it was a sold script in terms of action. But the dialogue was created by the people in the film, cause we knew each other and how we fit into each others lives. In ALWAYS, I am not a very good cook. So when I tried to cook, I burnt that fish. It made her sick, so she couldn't leave the house. It was a dramatic device, but it wasn't real. But what we're saying in the film, the emotion is real. What we're saying dialogue wise is very real. It takes a lot of practice to tell the truth. But the stuff we're saying to each other, and about each other is very real. I didn't wanna lose her.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Jaglom's film ALWAYS (1985), alongside his VENICE/VENICE (1992), and DEJA VU (1998) are currently available in a special edition box set through Breaking Glass Pictures: Henry Jaglom: Love & Romance Collection. You can purchase by clicking - here.

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<p style="text-align: justify;">Is Always (1985) a film, that you can watch today?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">For years I couldn't watch the film. It was just too emotional. It wasn't easy to make. I wasn't trying to be an artist or a hero. I was just trying to win the girl back. I wanted to get back to the essence of our relationship. I knew she loved me, but I couldn't win her back. It was tough. But I'm OK to watch it now.</p>

Given your style of film-making, and the way you create a script. How cooperative was Orson Welles to your style, doing **SOMEONE TO LOVE**(1987).</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Completely. But, more importantly, let me tell you this about Orson on that film. I had some problems shooting that film. I was having trouble with the crew. I'd select a certain camera set up, and the crew would argue with me, saying that if we shot the film this or that way it wouldn't cut. So I told Orson this, and he simply told me, 'Tell them it's a dream sequence.' So I did that, and the crew starts to fall over themselves to help me. I haven't shot a film since, were I haven't had an issue with a crew member in regards to shooting. And every time something like that happens, I tell them it's a dream sequence. And it works. Orson was right. He understood how people worked. He told me to tell them it was a dream sequence cause he understood that people are very used to working in method and structure. So by telling them it was to be a dream sequence he understood that it would free that person up to be creative, cause they associate dreams with something unreal, where everything is possible.</p>

Was Welles dialogue scripted?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Yes. It was written. But I encourage actors where there is written dialogue to make it their own. So I may do a first take with how the dialogue is written, but on the second or fourth take, the actor takes it and makes it their own to achieve something more truthful, that we can capture on film.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">What was the greatest thing you learned from Orson Welles?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Orson sat me down at lunch one day. I was upset cause I was running out of time and money on a film. He looked at me and said, 'The enemy of art is the absence of limitations.' Which means, if you have all the time and money in the world, you're gonna create something that's limited. But if you're forced to create while looking for solutions you'll break through those limitations. And from that day on, that ideal has been my mantra.</p>

On that same note, what do you think you taught Orson Welles?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">A willingness to just go ahead and do something without necessary having all the tools to do it. He was always asking me "how do you know you can get away with doing that?" I would tell him " I don't know, but why can't I just try it." I think that impressed him.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">What's your favorite Orson Welles film?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS. I love F FOR FAKE as well. Orson always said that F for Fake was his greatest film. And of course, he couldn't get it released. It never got seen, it never got reviewed here in the USA. It was a sad experience for him. But F FOR FAKE is a masterpiece.</p>

>If you had to choose just one Jaglom film to recommend, what film would you say is the essence of Henry Jaglom?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Well, how about rephrasing that? It's two questions, really. I can't pick just one film. So how about, what's one film that defines the essence of how I see life? I'd pick VENICE/VENICE. That's what it's really like to be me. It's how life feels to me. Then, DEJA VU. That film represents to me the romantic dream of life that I have always lived with somehow.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Silly question . Are you still wearing the patented Jaglom hat?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Well, I'm always wearing a hat. I have a rack, and I have 72 hats. I autograph pictures of myself where I'm two years old wearing a hat.</p>

How did IRENE IN TIME(2009) come about?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I've always been obsessed with films where love defeats death. Usually it's a romantic love, for example, films like, A GUY NAMED JOE with Spencer Tracy, and A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH with David Niven, where life and love beat death. These films always had a profound effect on me, so I wanted to make my own version on the theme.</p>

Where did you discover your lead actress, Tanna Frederick for IRENE IN TIME?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">She wrote me a letter actually. She was friends with an actor I had used previously in one of my films. So she asked him, "How do I get in one of Jaglom's films?" He told her,

"Jaglom is a sucker. Write him a letter telling him how much you like one of his movies, he'll bring you in for an audition." So she wrote me a 3 page letter about how much she loved DEJU VU. It was such a convincing letter that I brought her in. It took her four years to admit that she'd never actually seen the film.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">So Tanna Frederick is on contract with you at Rainbow Films? Why the decision for a contract? </p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Well I think she's the most exciting new talent out in Hollywood today. And I don't want to let her get away, and I don't want her to be picked up just to do junky things. She's being offered all kinds of stuff, she's very versatile. I think she's great, and I want her career to zoom, so I think putting her under contract is a good smart business decision. I'm doing my version of David O Selznick.</p>

One of my very favorite scenes in IRENE IN TIME is the conversion in the restaurant between Tanna Frederick and the girl with her dad. Hasn't she been in some of your other films?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">That little girl is my daughter actually. She's been acting for a while. She's done a few of my movies. She wants to be a director too. She's in her freshman year at film school right now actually.</p>

You're a film purist, that's still shooting on film, and hasn't gone digital or HD?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Right. I've got seventeen or eighteen films now, and they've all be done on film. There is nothing like film. Editing on a computer is fine. It's faster. But once we're done, we print back out to film, and the movie get's released on film. Film is a big part of the process for me. I may be the only one left in Hollywood using film. I just love it.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">What's the last truly great film you saw recently?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I can't think of one. I go back to my favorites of all time. Stuff like Fellini's 8 1/2 and the Bergman films. Film's that have influenced me and changed my life are what I am still watching today. The Bob Hope & Bing Crosby films, I still watch those. I love the 50's British comedies like, THE LADYKILLERS. It all goes back to childhood, what you see then, influences you. Orson Welles, F FOR FAKE. Jean Renior's RULES OF THE GAME.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">How do you feel about getting older?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Like it. Getting older, you get the depth of things more. You waste your time a lot less, and you appreciate things more. There is just more meaning. You no longer care about just 'me-me-me.' The canvas has become so very much more rich. I've been thinking about doing a film about this subject that I was gonna call, 'Aging.'</p>